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The Organization of an Open Shop Under the Midvale Plan

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THE need for a workers' organization of some kind in every plant must be apparent to every one interested in industrial development. Without such an organization, we have strikes, lockouts, large turnover of labor, slackness, poor discipline, and general dissatisfaction on the part of both employer and employee alike. With a good organization, these ills can be minimized.

Many experiments to placate the worker have been tried out in the past, but none have succeeded, chiefly because the human element has always been given insufficient consideration. The worker, being human, asks to be treated as a man, and not just as a cog in the machine; he does not want to be coddled or favored, but he wants the confidence and respect of his employer when he merits it, his labor and loyalty appreciated, and his just rights assured.

The relations between the employer and worker have been so strained in the past that almost universally they regard each other with suspicion and resentment, if not with open hostility. Among the many things responsible for this condition are class distinctions and class legislation (the fruits of which are at this time very apparent on the autocratic side in Germany, and on its opposite in Russia and the bolshevist movement everywhere).

The wily politician gets in his little work at every recurring election by shouting and vociferating for the workingman, what great things he or his party will do for the workers. Then, when elected, this wily gentleman usually votes as he is directed and the worker certainly has no say in the directing. He seems to ignore the fact that the American workingman, as a worker, wants nothing from his government, but as a citizen demands the same rights and privileges as are accorded to any other citizen no matter what his standing.

Then the autocratic employer will not take time and often has not the inclination to hear complaints from any worker; he

arbitrarily rules against the worker in every case without any regard as to the merits or demerits of the worker's complaint, because *he knows* the worker is always (?) wrong. Very much of this sort of thing is rapidly disappearing. Employers everywhere are searching for means to bring management and men in closer touch by coöperation and collective bargaining, to build up confidence and respect for both parties. They want the management and men to learn to work together with a decent regard for the rights of one another. It is conceded on all hands that the interests of employer and worker are identical. That being true, every effort should be made to have the interests of both parties brought to a harmonious, just and practical agreement. This can only be done by both parties getting together to discuss freely and fully any and all disputes and disagreements there may be between them, without prejudice or rancor, man fashion, face to face, and thus to thresh out their differences to a just conclusion. That the workers of a plant can be organized to bring about these long wanted conditions is no longer open to doubt.

In September, 1918, the Midvale Steel and Ordnance Company submitted to its employes, a plan entitled *Plan of Representation of Employes* which was promptly adopted by the workers. This plan is drafted to give the workers, through representatives chosen by themselves, the right to a voice in all matters pertaining to working conditions, wages, hours, welfare, etc., and is entirely in the hands of the wage earners themselves. No salaried official has, nor can have under the plan, anything to do with it. It is so simple in wording and operation there is no chance for misunderstanding.

The organization, under the plan, is made up at present of a committee of thirty-three elected from thirty divisions, on a basis of one representative to three hundred workers. This committee elects from its own number a committee, termed the Plant Conference Committee. One of the functions of this committee is to handle all matters concerning the election of representatives.

In method, the elections are similar to our municipal elections and are absolutely secret. Three workers are chosen by the committee in each division as an election board, and these three

men have full charge, under the supervision of the Plant Conference Committee, of conducting the election. Each board is provided with ballots, ballot box, return sheet, and a list of names and numbers of the voters in the division entitled to vote. Notices of nomination and election, indicating the number of representatives to be elected in each division, must be publicly posted in each division one week in advance of election and shall state that all employes are entitled to vote with the exception of salaried foremen and superintendents. Balloting for nominating representatives is held one week prior to general elections. Special elections are similarly called when, for any reason, a vacancy occurs in the representation of any division. To insure absolute freedom of choice, both nomination and election are by secret ballot, under conditions insuring an impartial count. Each employe entitled to vote, is given a nomination blank on which he writes the name of the fellow employe in his division whom he desires to nominate as his representative and himself deposits the blank in the ballot box. Employes unable to write may ask any of their fellow employes to write for them. Candidates to the number of twice as many representatives as the division is entitled to, receiving the highest number of votes, are regarded as the duly nominated candidates. For example, if the division is entitled to two representatives, then the four receiving the highest vote are placed on the ballot for election. The election board shall count the nominating ballots, making a list showing the number of votes cast for each person, and post notices, signed by each member of the board, publicly in each division, giving the number of votes cast for each person and announcing the nominees. These notices must be posted at least 48 hours before election. At the election of representatives, printed ballots, with the names of candidates, the number of the division and the number to be voted, are given to the election board. The worker steps up to vote, is identified by his shop badge, is given a ballot which he privately marks and deposits himself in the ballot box. Elections are held at the same time in all divisions and polls kept open for 24 hours, so as to give workers on all shifts a chance to vote. After the votes are counted by the election board, lists in triplicate, showing the number of votes cast for each candidate, are made out by them; one for the conference committee, one

for the general superintendent of the plant, and one to be posted in the division. Any representative proving unsatisfactory to not less than two-thirds of the workers of his division may be recalled and a successor elected.

The actual working of the plan is as follows: Any man having any grievance, or any matter on which he desires to have a decision, shall first present the subject to his immediate foreman or superintendent, either in person or through his representative. If unable to secure a satisfactory adjustment, the representative shall present the matter in writing for consideration to the Plant Conference Committee. If, in the judgment of the committee the grievance is a just one, they present the matter in writing to the general superintendent, who shall then confer with them, with a view of reaching a satisfactory settlement. The general superintendent, if he so desires, may call into this conference all of the division representatives. This has not as yet occurred in our plant. If the general superintendent and representatives are unable to agree on any question, the matter shall be referred to a committee, consisting of the general superintendent of all the plants of the company and all members of the Plant Conference Committees of all the plants. The combination is known as the General Committee. On all propositions submitted to this committee, the general superintendent shall cast one vote for the company, and the conference committees shall cast one vote for the employees. If this committee can reach no agreement, the matter shall be referred to arbitration. One person shall be elected as arbitrator if all parties can agree on his election, otherwise, there shall be a board of three arbitrators, one selected by the president of the company, one by the employee members of the General Committee. These two, if unable to agree, select a third arbitrator. The decision of the arbitrator or arbitrators shall be binding on both the company and the employees. Additions and amendments can be made to this plan when changing conditions or other circumstances make such change necessary.

Thus, in this most democratic manner are grievances adjusted. As a sample of the work done in this connection since the signing of the armistice, the working force of this plant has been reduced, due to lack of work, from about 11,000 to about 4,500, entailing innumerable changes and adjustments. These were made by the

managements, with the coöperation of this committee to the entire satisfaction of all parties.

Much of the matter written on the subject of collective bargaining is pure theory. What the writer has just said in regard to a system of collective bargaining is neither an argument nor a theory; it is a fact. The plan works; indeed, it has been a success from its inception and, as the workers become more and more intimate with its details, its success in the future is assured.

The advantages of all this to the workers are almost incalculable: it adds much to the dignity of his job and lifts him out of the depressing rut of drudgery, by giving him a part in the management of the plant, in so far as working conditions, discipline and welfare are concerned. Its benefits to him are to be measured only by the wisdom and energy with which he grasps the opportunities and meets the obligations afforded by this plan.

The advantages to the plant are just as vital, because it results in a strongly organized, efficient, well disciplined working force, in which every confidence can be placed. Self-respecting men contented with their jobs, giving their best, with the assurance that their rights will be recognized and their wrongs redressed, will make a working force that means peak production, with a minimum of friction and a minimum loss of money due to a large labor turnover. It may be a simple matter to fill a plant with men, but to get together a smooth working force is often an extremely difficult proposition.

One of the adverse criticisms of this plan is that men meeting in company time on company property cannot truly represent their fellows, that only men favored by the company can be elected as representatives and that all their activities are inspired and controlled by the management. Criticism of this sort we respectfully submit is a severe arraignment of the capacity of the worker to govern himself. If he is not fit to govern himself in an open shop, his case is hopeless, for the law of averages applies here as it does everywhere and the workers in an open shop are just as conscientious and just as independent as they are anywhere else. A careful reading of the details of our plan should be answer enough to such criticism of the future of such a scheme.

In this age of democracy, when men everywhere are trying by all sorts of means to lift up and improve living and working con-

ditions for everyone, with striking force there comes the old Biblical injunction, "Come let us reason together." This, if accompanied by mutual respect and confidence, together with a growing desire and demand for improvement at all times and the knowledge and faith that experience alone can give, will sooner or later bring us a long way toward solving the problems that have confronted employer and employe alike in the long past.